Cozy Apologia

SUMMARY

I could think about anything in the world and it would lead me back to you: even the lamp on my desk, the quiet rain, the blue ink that comes out of my pen drying on the page. I could think of any hero, fighting for any cause, at any point in history, and you'll be there as sure as an arrow shot through the heart from horseback, your legs braced in the stirrups. Your brow will be furrowed, concentrated, your armor glittering; you'll be there to set me free, smiling at me with one eye, your other eye staring down the enemy.

This modern world is all business, no romance: CDs and faxes, a risk-free get-it-over-with attitude. Today a hurricane is moving slowly up the coast. It has a weirdly male name: Floyd, Big Bad Floyd. The hurricane brings a flood of memories and day dreams: teenage crushes on silly boys who were only good at kissing. They all had girly names like Marcel, Percy, and Dewey. They were as skinny as a stick of licorice and just as chewy. They were sweet but they had a hollow center.

Floyd's cursing as he comes up the coast. You're hunkered down in your office and I'm in mine: both of us with desks, computers, hardwood floors. We're happy enough, but our romance isn't heavenly. Still I'm embarrassed by how happy we are. I mean, who's satisfied with just what's healthy? When has it ever been worth writing a love poem about an ordinary relationship? Yet, nothing else will keep away my sadness (you could call it the blues): so I fill these stolen moments with thoughts of you.

Over the course of the poem, the speaker meditates on the discrepancy between her passion for her lover and the mundane, bland world in which their love exists. At first, no matter what she thinks about, her mind turns to her lover—even the ink coming out of her pen reminds her of him. This is a testament to the power of their love, which has captivated her entirely. In the poem's first stanza, she expresses this passion in relatively clichéd terms: she imagines her husband as a "hero" in armor, riding a "dappled mare" coming to save her from "the enemy."

But soon enough the speaker realizes that these dreamy, romantic images are a bit ridiculous in this "post-postmodern age." They don't fit with the mundane, everyday realities of life in America in the late 1990s, with its "compact disks / And faxes." Indeed, such romantic fantasies seem a little juvenile or naive to the speaker: they remind her of "teenage crushes on worthless boys"—as violent and powerful as hurricanes, but also with "hollow center[s]," just like hurricanes. Such overly dramatic love is not real, not lasting: it is "sweet" but ultimately empty and hollow.

Thus even though the speaker's love may *seem* less powerful and less passionate, it ultimately meaningful and strong. As the poem closes the speaker and her lover are in their separate offices: they're working, not kissing each other "senseless." They are "content," even if their love isn't heavenly and they "fall short of the Divine." Thinking over her teenage crushes and the clichés of romance novels, the speaker has to wonder whether the mundane reality of her love is enough—if it is satisfying on its own terms, or if she needs the romantic passion it lacks.

The speaker concludes that not only is this sort of love enough, it alone can be enough—"nothing else will do." Her reason is simple: her love fills her life with joy, and without it she would know only "melancholy." The implication is clear: because passionate boys and teenage fantasies have "hollow center[s]," they are powerless to help her. They cannot cure her "melancholy," nor can they fill her with lasting joy. The love she has—mundane, everyday—is thus more powerful, more lasting, and more important than anything on offer in a romance novel. Forced to choose between romance and reality, "Cozy Apologia" lands solidly on the side of reality—with its complexity, its disappointments, and its abiding satisfactions.

THEMES

THE REALITY OF LOVE AND ROMANCE

"Cozy Apologia" meditates on the pleasures and rewards of a mature, stable relationship. Though the speaker enjoys such a relationship, she finds "this happiness" to be a little bit "embarrassing" because it doesn't live up to the ideals and clichés of romantic passion. But the poem is an "Apologia"—a poem dedicated to defending an idea, a "Cozy Apologia." It is committed to the value of the mundane pleasures of everyday life. Though such life may not be the stuff of romance novels—passionate, violent, and sexy—the speaker insists that her relationship is better than anything those novels can offer: compared to the sweet but empty pleasures of teenage fantasy, it offers real relief from life's sorrows and pains.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Before Line 1
- Lines 1-30

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

BEFORE LINE 1, LINES 1-3

...
... upon the page.

The first 3 lines of "Cozy Apologia" and its dedication establish the poem's form and hint at its broader questions. The poem begins with a dedication to "Fred." This suggests that the poem is autobiographical—since Rita Dove's husband is named Fred. Most readers thus treat the poem as a meditation on—and a defense of—the pleasures of Dove's marriage. Indeed, an "apologia" is a poem that defends an idea or concept. This "apologia" will defend the cozy and comfortable: the satisfactions of long-term commitment, even if that commitment lacks the grand passion of a romance novel.

In line 1, the speaker opens the poem talking directly to Fred (an instance of the poetic device apostrophe), testifying to the depth of her passion and love for him. No matter what she thinks about, she thinks of him. In lines 2-3, she then lists a series of mundane things—the lamp on her desk, the quiet rain outside the window, the ink of her pen, drying on the page. All of them, no matter how mundane, remind her of her lover. The tone of these lines is thus cozy, self-assured, comfortable. The speaker has no doubts about the pleasure and power of her relationship. Even the sound of these lines is soft and soothing. Note, for instance, the assonant /u/ sound in "blue" and "exudes"—a sound as smooth as the ink from the speaker's pen and as comforting as love itself. Indeed, the /u/ sound first appears at the end of line 1, in the word "you." The assonance thus suggests that the calm and comfort that the speaker experiences comes directly from her lover.

"Cozy Apologia" is a formally uneven poem. Though it is ultimately written in free verse, it starts out in something close to heroic couplets—rhyming lines of iambic pentameter. Lines 1-2 rhyme *AA*, for instance; the first line of the poem is roughly, but passably, metrical. In the opening lines, with their discussion of the mundane details of everyday life in the modern world—lamps and pens—this formalism feels slightly archaic, old-fashioned, out-of-place. That sense of old-fashionedness—of a disjuncture between the poem's form and the speaker's world—amplifies through the rest of the poem's first stanza.

LINES 4-8

I could choose ...
... with furrowed brow

In lines 1-3, the speaker describes the passionate love she feels for her lover, Fred. No matter what she thinks about, she ends up thinking about him. The language of the first three lines is relaxed and modern: she talks about mundane objects, like pens and paper. In lines 4-8, however, the poem takes a turn. Its tone shifts. Its language becomes much less ordinary. The speaker describes her lover as a "hero" riding a "dappled mare." He is, in other words, a knight in shining armor.

She's making the same point here as in lines 1-3. It doesn't matter what "hero ... cause or age" she thinks of: she always imagines her love as that hero—"there you'll be," as she says in line 8. She is as sure of it "as shooting arrows to the heart." The simile plays on "arrows" as a symbol for passionate, romantic love—and suggests that the speaker has given herself over to such images of love. She imagines love as something overwhelming, dramatic, overpowering. In other words, these lines indulge in a series of clichés: for all their poetic beauty, they could be ripped straight from the pages of a dime-store romance novel.

Those clichés feel out of touch with the poem's setting. As the first 3 lines hint, the poem is set in the modern world: there are no knights in shining armor running around in the 1990s. The speaker's fantasy is at odds with the world in which she lives: indeed, it seems like an attempt to escape from that world. Or, better, the speaker has these romantic fantasies in her head; she's absorbed them from stories of love and what love is supposed to be—and when she lets her mind wander, they come rushing in, unbidden. The speaker thus has to decide which she prefers: the passionate fantasy of the stories or the mundane reality of her actual life. This is not an easy choice: the fantasy inspires excitement in the speaker. This is evident in the use of enjambment in these lines. Lines 4-8 are all enjambed, which gives them a breathless, tumbling quality—and captures the speaker's desire.

The poem's form and its sound reinforce the archaic, out-of-date character of the speaker's fantasies. These lines are heavily alliterative. Note, for instance, the strong /s/ sounds in line 7: "standing in silver stirrups." That makes them feel old-fashioned—especially compared to the restrained, conversational, and un-alliterative poems most poets were writing in the 1990s. And the lines remain, more or less, in heroic couplets: rhyming *AABBCC*, with some of their lines written in iambic pentameter. (However, many of its lines do not have a regular meter at all—such as line 8—and even the lines that do have a meter are often irregular and shifting. So despite the poem's flirtations with meter, it is best described as being written in free verse). Although heroic couplets have a distinguished history in English poetry, they were very out of fashion by the time Rita Dove wrote "Cozy Apologia." As the speaker engages in this archaic fantasy, the poem's form becomes itself archaic, strangely old-fashioned for a poem written in the 1990s.

LINES 9-10

And chain mail ...
... upon the enemy.

In lines 8-10, the speaker continues to fantasize about her

lover as a knight in shining armor—she even describes him wearing "glinting" "chain mail." ("Chain mail" is a kind of armor worn by medieval knights). Further, she imagines herself as a damsel in distress: he has come to "set [her] free." She emphasizes his chivalry and bravery. He has "one eye smiling" courteously at her, but his other eye is "firm upon the enemy." This is a bit hard to visualize literally—his face ends up split in two. It's best understood as a metaphor for his dedication to the speaker, his willingness to fight against any "enemy" on her behalf. The opposition between these two sides of his character is emphasized by the caesura at the center of the line, which splits the line in two.

In other words, these lines continue to play with cliché, recreating traditional ideas about love and gender. They feel like a fantasy from a romance novel. But the reader shouldn't simply dismiss this fantasy as so much cliché. It may be a cliché, but it still has a powerful hold on the speaker, offering her comfort and consolation. That comfort is evident in the strong end-stops that close both lines 9-10. These lines are as firm and definite as the knight himself. For the speaker, just imagining her lover as such a knight gives her power and confidence.

That sense of confidence is also reflected in the strong rhyme between "free" that ends line 9 and "enemy" that ends line 10. The rhyme feels old-fashioned, a little piece of poetic elegance that matches the speaker's old-fashioned fantasy. But the poem's meter is rough here. Where, elsewhere in the stanza, the speaker has sometimes flirted with iambic pentameter, neither of these lines are metrical. Instead, they are closer to free verse (though they do rhyme). This failure to consistently follow a meter suggests some underlying uncertainty about the fantasy itself. The speaker can't quite commit to this old-fashioned world—and so she can't commit to this old-fashioned way of writing poetry either.

LINES 11-13

This post-postmodern age ...
... Event.

The speaker spends most of the first stanza lost in fantasy: she imagines her lover as a knight in shining armor, come to rescue her. This fantasy is not just a cliché. It also feels strangely archaic, out of joint with the world in which the speaker lives. In lines 11-13, at the start of the poem's second stanza, the speaker describes that world. She starts by calling it the "post-postmodern age." "Postmodernism" is an idea drawn from the works of philosophers like Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard. It encompasses a wide range of things—from architecture to economics, politics to literature. But, in its many manifestations it has some common dynamics. It is broadly characterized by detachment and irony. In other words, it is just the opposite of the romantic fantasy the speaker outlines in the poem's first stanza, with its passion and sincerity. Calling the present moment the "post-postmodern age," the speaker suggests that it is even *more* ironic and detached than postmodernism itself.

She then describes the objects and attitudes that characterize the world she lives in. She mentions two different technologies, used in business and communication: "compact disks / And faxes." These serve as symbols for the modern world more broadly—and they aren't particularly nice or warm symbols. Instead, they suggest that its priorities are practical and business-like: it has no grandeur or romance. As the speaker complains in lines 12-13, it is a "do-it-now-and-take-no-risks / Event." In place of the brave knight in shining armor, ready to risk his life on her behalf, the modern world is characterized by pragmatism, a resistance to taking risks.

The speaker's distaste for the modern world is evident in the way these lines sound. The assonant /i/ sound in "business" "disks" and "risks" is harsh and sharp—quite different from the soft, soothing assonant /u/ sounds in the poem's opening lines. Thus, though these lines rhyme *AA*—the same rhyme scheme as appeared in the previous stanza—their rhyme sounds unpleasant. It doesn't have any of the archaic grandeur of the previous stanza's rhymes. And they're also a little ridiculous: it seems a bit funny to rhyme "compact disks" and "take-no-risks." Finally, these lines slide away from meter. Neither of them can be plausibly scanned as being in iambic pentameter. As the speaker begins to describe the modern world, the poem's form shifts to reflect the irony and detachment of "this post-postmodern age," losing the integrity and sincerity it had in the previous stanza.

LINES 13-17

Today a hurricane ...
... kiss you senseless.

In lines 13-17, the speaker continues to describe the modern world, focusing on a hurricane that's moving up the Eastern seaboard. Here, the speaker refers to a real hurricane, Hurricane Floyd, which ravaged the Bahamas and the eastern United States in the fall of 1999. The reference to this hurricane dates the poem fairly precisely. And it also allows the speaker to slip back into fantasy. She personifies the hurricane, describing it as "oddly male" and calls it "Big Bad Floyd." Once she's begun to think of the hurricane as a man, it reminds her in its swagger and destructive power of the "worthless boys" she had crushes on as a teenager. Those boys were good for just one thing: their "only talent was to kiss you senseless." In other words, they were passionate lovers, seductive, enrapturing in their way. Their seductive power is echoed by the strong consonant /s/ sounds that run through this passage, in words like "worthless," "kiss" and "senseless." The passage thus sounds as seductive—and as slippery—as the "worthless boys" themselves. The consonance casts a shadow over their love, suggesting that it is not as solid, or as powerful, as it seems.

As the speaker reminisces then, she slides back into fantasy.

But this fantasy is different from her earlier fantasy. There she was drawing on the clichés of romance novels. Here she's returning to teenage passions. But the content of both fantasies are similar, even continuous: they both present an escape from the mundanities of this "post-postmodern age" into a world of passion, romance, and desire. The speaker started the poem by celebrating her love for "Fred," her husband—but her fantasies have led her away from him and away from the world she shares with him. The speaker thus seems to be approaching a kind of crisis: she has to decide which is more important to her, the fantasy or the reality.

These lines mark an important formal shift in the poem. Through its first half, the poem has rhymed *AABB*. But after line 14, the rhyme scheme shifts, becoming less stable and predictable. None of these lines rhyme, though there's a strong consonant link between lines 15 and 17, with the /s/ sound in "reminiscences" and "senseless." Further, none of these lines are written in iambic pentameter. Although the speaker is indulging in fantasy here, the language she uses has none of the archaic grandeur of the first stanza. Instead, the lines are as "awkward" as her "reminiscences" of her relationships with "worthless boys" are themselves.

LINES 18-20

They all had ...
... and hollow center.

In lines 18-20, the speaker continues to reminisce about the "worthless boys"—and her "teenage crushes" on them. She begins by calling into question their masculinity, using a derogatory term. "They all had sissy names," she complains, and then lists a few: "Marcel, Percy, Dewey." The use of asyndeton here makes the line feel a bit breathless—and thus conveys the speaker's desire and excitement. (Alternately, one might read it as expressing the speaker's impatience with the "worthless boys"). At the same time, this line carries forward the strong consonant /s/ sound that appeared in lines 15-17, in words like "sissy" and "Marcel" and "Percy." This line thus also feels seductive, echoing the seductive power of these "worthless boys"—and, like them, it also feels a little suspect, all show and no substance.

Indeed, in lines 19-20, the speaker offers a sharp critique of these "worthless boys." Sure, they had their pleasures: indeed, she says, using a simile, they were like "licorice": "thin," "chewy," and "sweet." But they're also "dark" and, crucially, they have a "hollow center." In other words, they're ultimately empty; their love is unsatisfying. This is a key turning point in the poem. Though the speaker has indulged in fantasy through the first two stanzas—fantasies that have, at times, taken her far from her husband—here she begins to reject those fantasies. And she turns toward the project she announced in the poem's title—a defense of her cozy relationship with her husband, "Fred."

After the uncertain rhymes of the previous four lines, lines 18-19 snap back into the poem's earlier form: they are a neat rhyming couplet. However, in this context, it feels a bit too neat: like the "worthless boys" the speaker describes, the rhymes are a bit too sweet, a bit empty at their heart. Similarly, lines 19 and 20 are close—if not exactly—to iambic pentameter. The speaker's fantasy has returned the poem to its earlier flirtation with heroic couplets. But as the poem's form continues to break down in the next stanza, this brief moment of restored grandeur feels less and less convincing.

LINES 20-24

Floyd's ...
... of the Divine.

After spending lines 15-20 lost in reminiscences about "worthless boys" and "teenage" crushes," the speaker suddenly snaps back to reality, returning to the mundane, unremarkable world around her. The hurricane is still moving up the coast: "Floyd's / cussing up a storm," the speaker notes in lines 20-21. This comment personifies the storm again. But this time, the personification doesn't draw the speaker into fantasy. Instead, she simply describes what she and her lover are doing: he's "bunkered" in his "aerie" (a metaphor for his office); she's "perched in hers." Their offices are similar: they have the same "desks, computers, hardwood floors." The speaker concludes, "We're content, but fall short of the Divine." In other words, she and Fred are happy enough, but their love isn't heavenly. Speaking metaphorically, their love lacks the romance and passion she has been fantasizing about. The reader might wonder whether such a love is really enough for the speaker—or whether she feels some frustration with the reality of her relationship, just as she does with "this post-postmodern age."

And there is some frustration evident here. Note the way the speaker uses asyndeton, for instance, in line 23. Where, in line 18, asyndeton conveyed desire and passion, here it makes the speaker simply sound a bit bored with these banal details, rushing through them. And the sound of these lines also conveys a certain amount of frustration, with their hard consonant /r/ and alliterative /d/ sounds:

> (Twin desks, computers, hardwood floors):
> We're content, but fall short of the Divine

The /r/ sounds make this world sound sharp, unwelcoming. The /d/ sound links together something banal—a desk—with something sublime—the "Divine." In doing so, it emphasizes how far the reality of the speaker's relationship is from the "Divine."

After the brief moment of formal coherence in lines 18-20, things begin to break down again here. Line 20 doesn't rhyme with anything at all. And while lines 21-24 rhyme *ABAB*, their

rhythm is choppy: while line 21 is close to iambic pentameter, line 22 is just six syllables long, four syllables shorter than line 21. These unpredictable shifts are accentuated by the sharp enjambments in the passage—indeed line 20 is even enjambed across a stanza break. These enjambments also produce strange, awkward caesuras—like the one right at the end of line 20. Working together, enjambment and caesura make the passage feel unpredictable, uneven. The poem's formal breakdown here conveys the speaker's disappointment with the real world—so far from the grandeur and order of her earlier fantasies.

LINES 25-30

Still, it's embarrassing, ...
... time with you.

In lines 21-24, the speaker returns from her flights of fantasy to reality—and to her pleasant, but ordinary relationship with her lover. "We're content, but fall short of the Divine," the speaker acknowledges. In other words, they're happy enough—but their relationship lacks the romance and passion of her fantasies. The reader might wonder whether that's enough. In the final 6 lines of the poem, the speaker makes a strong case that it is.

She feels the powerful pull of her fantasies such that her happiness with her actual love life is "embarrassing": no one ever brags about enjoying the "ordinary." And yet, she does enjoy it. People are rarely "satisfied simply with what's good for us." But she and her lover are satisfied with their love. Indeed, "nothing else will do." As she makes these declarations, the speaker uses end-stops. These end-stops convey her conviction and certainty, the reassurance she draws from her relationship. Nothing else can satisfy the speaker, can bring her joy—and, as she announces, in the poem's final lines, nothing else will "keep [her] from melancholy" or "blues." In other words, her love keeps her from feeling sad, depressed. It is just the opposite of the love the "worthless boys" offer. Where their love is "dark" and has a "hollow center," her relationship with "Fred" appears ordinary on its surface, but provides deep satisfactions—it sustains her in dark times. The speaker ends the poem the way she began it. She uses apostrophe, directly addressing "Fred" once again: "I fill this stolen time with you." In other words, the speaker is writing the poem to acknowledge the quiet power of her relationship with her lover. The return to apostrophe re-centers the poem: after drifting into fantasy, the poem ends fully focused on "Fred." And the ending of the poem also fulfills the promise of its title, providing a strong defense or "Apologia" for the "cozy"—the comfortable, the warm, the ordinary.

The end of the poem is formally uneven. It is written in free verse, with shifting rhythms and line lengths. The poem has fully abandoned the *AABB* rhyme scheme that dominated its first fourteen lines. Lines 25-26 don't rhyme at all; lines 27-30 rhyme *ABAB*. This poem has switched from an archaic but straightforward rhyme scheme to something altogether more complicated and unstable. The switch in the rhyme scheme thus reflects the change in the speaker's ideas, reflecting her shift from a simplistic—if beautiful—fantasy to a full appreciation of the complexities and mundanities of a real relationship.

SYMBOLS

ARROWS

"Arrows" are a symbol of love and romantic passion. In a tradition derived from Greek mythology, Love is often depicted as a child—Cupid—who carries a bow and arrow. He shoots unsuspecting people in the heart with his arrows, making them fall in love instantly and passionately. The myth thus contains some assumptions about what love is, how it works. Love is overwhelming and overpowering; falling in love involves a loss of self-control, a loss of judgment. The symbol thus fits with the speaker's romantic fantasies, her longing for a passionate love affair drawn from the pages of romance novels. And it stands in implicit contrast with the poem's setting—in the mundane, bland, even disappointing world of America in the late 1990s.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "arrows"

COMPACT DISKS AND FAXES

"Compact disks / And faxes" are symbols of the modern world—the technologies people use to conduct business and communicate with each other. Although these technologies sound out of date now, at the time the poem was written they were cutting edge. But this novelty doesn't make them sexy or exciting. For the speaker, they represent everything that is mundane, bland, even disappointing about modern life: it lacks passion, romance, and grandeur. As the speaker says, these technologies embody a "do-it-now-and-take-no-risks" approach entirely out-of-keeping with the speaker's fantasies in the first stanza—with knights in shining armor ready to take on "the enemy" on her behalf. As symbols, then, "Compact disks / And faxes" suggest the disappointments of modern life—and the discrepancy between the speaker's fantasies and her reality.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 11-12:** "compact disks / And faxes"

POETIC DEVICES

END-STOPPED LINE

"Cozy Apologia" uses both enjambment and end-stop throughout. But the poem doesn't follow a pattern or scheme about when it uses these devices. Instead, the poem's use of end-stop tends to reflect the speaker's mood, shifting to reflect the changes in her thinking as the poem unfolds. For instance, after a long run of enjambed lines that stretches from line 4 to line 8, the speaker uses two end-stops in a row at the end of the poem's first stanza:

> ...And chain mail glinting, to set me free:
> One eye smiling, the other firm upon the enemy.

The end-stops are themselves firm and confident. They reflect the bravery and determination of the knight in shining armor that the speaker fantasizes about. In this way, they also reflect the certainty and confidence that he imparts to the speaker.

Elsewhere, the poem uses end-stop to reflect the comfort the speaker feels in her relationship with her lover. Note, for instance, the run of end-stopped lines at the heart of the poem's third stanza:

> We're content, but fall short of the Divine.
> Still, it's embarrassing, this happiness—
> Who's satisfied simply with what's good for us,
> When has the ordinary ever been news?

The speaker is "embarrass[ed]" by her happiness because it's so out of keeping with the grand fantasies of romance novels or the passionate dreams of adolescence: it's calm, predictable, rewarding in quiet but significant ways. These lines, with their strong end-stops thus feel like the speaker's relationship: solid but limited. The poem's end-stops thus mean different things in different parts of the poem. But they consistently reflect the speaker's mood, her changing thoughts about love, romance, and her own relationship.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "you—"
- **Line 3:** "page."
- **Line 9:** "free:"
- **Line 10:** "enemy."
- **Line 13:** "coast,"
- **Line 17:** "senseless."
- **Line 18:** "Dewey;"
- **Line 19:** "chewy,"
- **Line 23:** "floors):"
- **Line 24:** "Divine."
- **Line 25:** "happiness—"
- **Line 26:** "us,"
- **Line 27:** "news?"
- **Line 30:** "you."

ENJAMBMENT

"Cozy Apologia" uses enjambment to reflect its speaker's shifting ideas about love and romance. At points, the speaker uses it to register the passion and desire that her romantic fantasies generate. For instance, note the run of enjambed lines in the poem's first stanza:

> I could choose any hero, any cause or age
> And, sure as shooting arrows to the heart,
> Astride a dappled mare, legs braced as far apart
> As standing in silver stirrups will allow—
> There you'll be, with furrowed brow
> And chain mail glinting, to set you free:

Except for the final quoted line, all of these lines are enjambed. (Even line 7, which ends with an em-dash is enjambed, even though em-dashes usually indicate an end-stop. Here, the line is enjambed because it's part of a subordinate clause: the sentence isn't complete until the start of line 8 which introduces, finally, a main verb and a grammatical subject—"There you'll be"—for the phrase that starts way back in line 5, "And, sure as shooting..."). Because all these lines are enjambed, some of them quite sharply, the passage takes on a breathless, rushed quality. One can hear the speaker's passion in the way these lines speed forward, spilling recklessly across the line breaks.

But the speaker uses enjambment for different reasons in different parts of the poem. While it conveys desire and passion in lines 4-10, elsewhere the poem uses enjambment to reinforce the sense that the modern world, with its "compact disks / and faxes" is a bit disappointing. Note, for instance, the enjambments in lines 20-22:

> Sweet with a dark and hollow center. Floyd's
>
> Cussing up a storm. You're bunkered in your
> Aerie, I'm perched in mine...

As the speaker considers her actual life—apart from teenage crushes and romantic fantasies—the poem's form breaks down, as is evident in this passage. While the poem often flirts with iambic pentameter, line 22 is only six syllables long. And the enjambment in line 20 (after "Floyd's") spills across not just two lines but in fact across two stanzas, something one would rarely see in the kind of poet Dove imitates earlier in the poem. These enjambments thus feel disruptive, and communicate how the modern world falls short of the speaker's expectations in the

way that the lines themselves come up short. The role of enjambment thus shifts as the speaker's mood shifts—reflecting her complicated engagement with romantic love and the mundane realities of everyday life.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** "blue / My"
- **Lines 4-5:** "age / And"
- **Lines 5-6:** "heart, / Astride"
- **Lines 6-7:** "apart / As"
- **Lines 7-8:** "allow— / There"
- **Lines 8-9:** "brow / And"
- **Lines 11-12:** "disks / And"
- **Lines 12-13:** "risks / Event"
- **Lines 14-15:** "host / Of"
- **Lines 15-16:** "reminiscences / Of"
- **Lines 16-17:** "boys / Whose"
- **Lines 20-21:** "Floyd's / Cussing"
- **Lines 21-22:** "your / Aerie"
- **Lines 22-23:** "mine / (Twin"
- **Lines 28-29:** "do / To"
- **Lines 29-30:** "blues), / I"

CAESURA

Caesuras appear throughout "Cozy Apologia." Not all these caesuras are particularly significant to the poem—often they just separate parenthetical phrases or items on a list. But they often work to reinforce the speaker's fantasies, desires, and arguments, usually in coordination with other devices. For example, there's a caesura midway through line 10:

> One eye smiling, the other firm upon the enemy.

Here the speaker is using two metaphors to describe how her knight in shining armor is both courteous and brave. While he looks gently at her, he gazes fiercely at their "enemy." The caesura neatly splits the line—and its two metaphors—dividing friend and foe, chivalry and bravery. It thus emphasizes the two sides of the lover's personality, and his fierce dedication to the speaker.

Elsewhere, the poem's caesuras emphasize its sometimes choppy enjambments, as in lines 20—22:

> Sweet with a dark and hollow center. Floyd's
>
> Cussing up a storm. You're bunkered in your
> Aerie, I'm perched in mine…

The caesuras which appear throughout these lines emphasize the sense of disorder and disappointment. They appear just before the ends of lines (with the period after "center"), right after the start of lines (with the comma after "Aerie"). They intervene in the reader's experience of the poem, helping to make the lines choppy and uncertain. Caesura thus works with other devices—like metaphor and enjambment—to emphasize the speaker's argument, her desires, and her frustrations.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** ", " ", "
- **Line 3:** ", " ", "
- **Line 4:** ", "
- **Line 5:** ", "
- **Line 6:** ", "
- **Line 8:** ", "
- **Line 9:** ", "
- **Line 10:** ", "
- **Line 11:** ": "
- **Line 12:** ", "
- **Line 13:** ". "
- **Line 14:** ": ," ", "
- **Line 15:** ": "
- **Line 18:** "—," ", ," ", "
- **Line 20:** ". "
- **Line 21:** ". "
- **Line 22:** ", "
- **Line 23:** ", " ", "
- **Line 24:** ", "
- **Line 25:** ", " ", "
- **Line 28:** ", "
- **Line 29:** " ("

ALLITERATION

Alliteration appears throughout "Cozy Apologia." It plays different roles at different points in the poem—underlining the shifts in the speaker's ideas, fantasies, and arguments about romance. The poem's alliteration really picks up in lines 4-10. After the first 3 lines, which are relatively sparse in their use of alliteration, these lines feel dense with alliteration, as in line 7:

> …As standing in silver stirrups will allow—

These lines are intentionally a little cliché, even archaic. The speaker is describing a fantasy drawn straight from the pages of a romance novel, complete with a knight in shining armor. The alliteration helps these lines sound and feel archaic. Many poets of Dove's generation rejected heavy alliteration, preferring restrained, unpretentious, conversational language. The alliterations in this passage thus sound a little old-fashioned—not the kind of thing one would expect from a leading poet of the 1990s. In that way, the alliterations reinforce the sense that the speaker's fantasies are out of keeping with the mundane, work-a-day world in which she lives.

Elsewhere, the speaker uses alliteration to underscore the disappointments of that world. Note, for instance, the /d/ sound

in lines 23-24:

> (Twin desks, computers, hardwood floors):
> We're content, but fall short of the Divine.

The alliterative /d/ sound links together two very different things—the desks where the speaker and her husband work and the "Divine," a metaphor for the heavenly love that the speaker dreams about. The reader may be surprised to see these things linked together. They're practically opposites: the mundane world of daily work joined to the celestial and sublime. But that surprise is part of the speaker's point: she and her lover "fall short of the Divine." While she might dream of such divinity, she is inevitably brought back down to earth, with its bland demands and responsibilities. The alliteration in these lines underlines the sense of disappointment with which the speaker wrestles throughout the poem. Alliteration thus plays a variety of roles in the poem—but it remains consistent in the way it tracks the shifts in the speaker's mood, bolstering her ideas, fantasies, and arguments.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "pen," "page"
- **Line 4:** "could," "cause"
- **Line 5:** "sure," "shooting"
- **Line 7:** "standing," "silver," "stirrups"
- **Line 8:** "be," "furrowed," "brow"
- **Line 9:** "free"
- **Line 10:** "firm"
- **Line 11:** "post," "postmodern"
- **Line 12:** "now," "no"
- **Line 13:** "nudging"
- **Line 14:** "Big," "Bad," "brings"
- **Line 16:** "teenage"
- **Line 17:** "talent"
- **Line 20:** "Sweet," "center"
- **Line 23:** "desks," "computers"
- **Line 24:** "content," "Divine"
- **Line 26:** "satisfied," "simply," "with," "what's"
- **Line 27:** "When," "been," "news"
- **Line 28:** "because," "nothing"
- **Line 29:** "me," "melancholy"

ASSONANCE

Assonance appears throughout "Cozy Apologia." It often gives the poem a soft, soothing sound—in keeping with the warm, cozy love that it celebrates and defends. For instance, note the soft /u/ sound in lines 2 and 3:

> This lamp, the wind-still rain, the glossy blue
> My pen exudes, drying matte, upon the page.

The /u/ sound is smooth, reassuring. It flows smoothly, like the ink out of the speaker's pen. It thus creates a reassuring, calm environment. That calm seems to come directly from the love the speaker feels: note how the same /u/ sound appears in line 1, in the word "you." The warm, comfortable ambiance of the poem seems to flow from the speaker's lover. Before the speaker begins to examine the complications of romance and reality, this assonance gives the reader a sense of how the poem will end—that the speaker is not seriously in distress, but rather considering these questions from a place of comfort and security.

This warm, soft sonic palette doesn't last forever. The speaker uses harsher assonant sounds elsewhere in the poem to underscore disappointments with the modern world, "the post-postmodern age" in which she lives. Note the harsh /i/ sound in lines 11-12:

> This post-postmodern age is all business: compact disks
> And faxes, a do-it-now-and-take-no risks
> Event.

With its bitter, sharp tone, the /i/ sound in these lines clashes strongly with the soothing sounds in the poem's first stanza—underlining the discrepancy between the speaker's feelings toward her lover and the bland, unromantic world where she lives. The poem's assonance thus does different things in different parts of the poem: emphasizing the speaker's comfort and security in her relationship with her lover and, elsewhere, her sense of frustration with the modern world.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "pick," "think," "you"
- **Line 2:** "wind," "still," "blue"
- **Line 3:** "exudes," "page"
- **Line 4:** "choose," "age"
- **Line 5:** "heart"
- **Line 6:** "far," "apart"
- **Line 7:** "silver," "will," "allow"
- **Line 8:** "brow"
- **Line 9:** "chain," "mail," "me," "free"
- **Line 10:** "enemy"
- **Line 11:** "post," "postmodern," "business," "disks"
- **Line 12:** "risks"
- **Line 13:** "nudging," "up," "coast"
- **Line 14:** "host"
- **Line 17:** "to," "you"
- **Line 18:** "sissy," "Dewey"
- **Line 19:** "chewy"
- **Line 21:** "storm," "You're," "your"
- **Line 22:** "mine"
- **Line 23:** "floors"

- **Line 24:** "short," "Divine"
- **Line 25:** "it's," "this"
- **Line 26:** "satisfied"
- **Line 27:** "been," "news"
- **Line 28:** "will," "do"
- **Line 29:** "me," "melancholy," "blues"
- **Line 30:** "fill," "you"

CONSONANCE

"Cozy Apologia" contains a lot of consonance—there's some in every line of the poem. But the role that it plays shifts as the speaker's mood shifts. For instance, in lines 15-1, the speaker uses a consonant /s/ sound to emphasize the seductive appeal of the "worthless boys" she had crushes on as a teenager:

> awkward reminiscences
> of teenage crushes on worthless boys
> Whose only talent was to kiss you senseless.
> They all had sissy names: Marcel, Percy, Dewey;

The /s/ sound is overwhelming, snaking through these lines, giving them the seductive power of a smooth-talking boy. But that slipperiness is suspect: it suggests that their love lacks substance. Consonance thus does two things at once here: it emphasizes the power of the speaker's crushes and, at the same time, suggests why she eventually renounces these boys and their empty love.

Later in the poem, the speaker uses consonance to emphasize the disappointments of the real world—its hard, unforgiving surfaces, its distance from the ecstasies of teenage fantasy. One can hear this in the hard /r/ sound that appears in lines 23-24:

> (Twin desks, computers, hardwood floors):
> We're content, but fall short of the Divine.

The /r/ sound in these lines is as hard as the speaker's "hardwood floors." Coming shortly after lines 15-18, with their slippery, seductive /s/ sounds, this run of consonance feels particularly dissonant and sharp: one hears in it the difference between the speaker's teenage fantasies and the real world in which she lives. The speaker thus uses consonance for different, even opposite purposes—to play up the power of her fantasies and crushes; to emphasize the difficulties of real life and a real relationship.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "pick," "anything," "think"
- **Line 2:** "lamp," "still," "glossy"
- **Line 3:** "pen," "page"
- **Line 4:** "could," "choose," "cause"
- **Line 5:** "sure," "shooting," "arrows," "heart"
- **Line 6:** "Astride," "mare," "braced," "far," "apart"
- **Line 7:** "standing," "silver," "stirrups," "will"
- **Line 8:** "you'll," "be," "furrowed," "brow"
- **Line 9:** "mail," "glinting," "me," "free"
- **Line 10:** "smiling," "firm," "enemy"
- **Line 11:** "post," "postmodern," "disks"
- **Line 12:** "it," "take," "risks"
- **Line 13:** "Event," "Today," "hurricane," "nudging," "coast"
- **Lines 14-14:** "Big / Bad"
- **Line 14:** "Floyd," "brings," "host"
- **Line 15:** "daydreams," "awkward," "reminiscences"
- **Line 16:** "teenage," "crushes," "worthless," "boys"
- **Line 17:** "Whose," "talent," "kiss," "senseless"
- **Line 18:** "sissy," "names," "Marcel," "Percy," "Dewey"
- **Line 19:** "Were," "licorice"
- **Line 20:** "Sweet," "dark," "hollow," "center," "Floyd," "'s"
- **Line 21:** "Cussing," "storm," "bunkered," "your"
- **Line 22:** "perched," "mine"
- **Line 23:** "desks," "computers," "hardwood," "floors"
- **Line 24:** "content," "short," "Divine"
- **Line 25:** "embarrassing," "this," "happiness"
- **Line 26:** "satisfied," "simply," "with," "what"
- **Line 27:** "When," "ordinary," "ever," "been," "news"
- **Line 28:** "because," "nothing," "will"
- **Line 29:** "me," "melancholy," "call," "blues"
- **Line 30:** "fill," "stolen," "time"

METAPHOR

As the speaker of "Cozy Apologia" defends the satisfying—if ordinary—relationship she shares with her husband, she turns to metaphor occasionally to help make her argument. These metaphors tend to be incidental. They're not bold or loud; they don't take up a lot of the reader's attention. Their role is supportive. They help the speaker paint a vivid picture of her stable love with her husband—as well as the passionate, but ultimately, empty forms of love that she rejects.

For instance, in lines 4-10, the speaker fantasizes about her lover as a knight in shining armor. The long fantasy concludes in line 10 with two metaphors. He has:

> One eye smiling, the other firm upon the enemy.

He isn't literally looking at two things at once with his face split in half. Instead, this is a metaphor for the way that her lover focuses his attention. He is kind and gentle toward the speaker; he is brave and fierce confronting their enemies. He has no time or attention for anything else. He is the consummate knight in shining armor, chivalrous and brave. The metaphor thus helps flesh out the speaker's fantasy. In doing so, it turns the speaker's lover into a caricature—he's hardly a real person by

the end of line 10. And that makes it easier for the speaker to eventually reject this fantasy, since the reality of her lover is more satisfying than the fantasy.

The speaker picks up this thread in line 24, where she proclaims about her relationship:

> We're content, but fall short of the Divine.

While she's happy enough in her relationship, it isn't "Divine." In other words, it isn't heavenly or out-of-this-world—doesn't have the passion of a romance novel or a teenage fantasy. Instead, it's very much part of the everyday, mundane world of America in the late 1990s with its "compact disks / And faxes." The metaphor thus helps the speaker explain both what's good—and bad—about her relationship, giving the reader a sense of what she values and why.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** "the glossy blue / My pen exudes, drying matte / , upon the page."
- **Line 10:** "One eye smiling, the other firm upon the enemy."
- **Line 13:** "Today a hurricane is nudging up the coast"
- **Lines 14-15:** "a host / Of daydreams"
- **Line 17:** "Whose only talent was to kiss you senseless"
- **Lines 21-22:** "You're bunkered in your / Aerie, I'm perched in mine"
- **Line 24:** "We're content, but fall short of the Divine"

SIMILE

"Cozy Apologia" contains two similes. The first appears in line 5. The speaker is describing how—no matter what she's thinking of—her thoughts turn to her lover:

> I could choose any hero, any cause of age
> And, sure as shooting arrows to the heart…
> There you'll be…

In other words, the speaker's lover always comes to her mind. It's as certain as an "arrow" flying toward "the heart." The simile plays on the symbolic properties of "arrows." They often symbolize love and passion. For instance, Cupid carries a bow and arrow and shoots his victims in the hearts—which makes them fall instantly, passionately, in love. The speaker's thoughts are like Cupid's arrows. They have all the certainty and strength of love at first sight. The speaker will eventually come to question how meaningful and satisfying this kind of love really is. But at this moment, the simile offers the speaker—and the reader—powerful assurance that her love has all the passion of a romance novel.

The second simile appears in lines 18-20, where the speaker describes the "worthless boys" on whom she had crushes when she was a teenager. Although they were good kissers—indeed, their "only talent was to kiss you senseless"—they were

> thin as licorice and as chewy,
> Sweet with a dark and hollow center.

The simile compares the boys to licorice—both its good and bad qualities. They have the good qualities of licorice—they're sweet and chewy. But they also have its bad side: they are "dark" on the inside and they have a "hollow center." In other words, their love is ultimately empty and unsatisfying. The simile thus allows the speaker to meditate on the pleasures of her teenage crushes—and, at the same time, to call attention to the shortcomings of that kind of love. It thus sets up the poem's conclusion: its defense of the mundane, but cozy relationship she shares with her husband.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "sure as shooting arrows to the heart,"
- **Lines 19-20:** "Were thin as licorice and as chewy, / Sweet with a dark and hollow center."

PERSONIFICATION

The speaker of "Cozy Apologia" uses personification in two places in the poem, both times to describe Hurricane Floyd, a major hurricane that struck the Bahamas and the east coast of the United States in the fall of 1999. The speaker describes the hurricane as a man, calling it "oddly male" and "big bad Floyd." Later, the speaker leans in to the idea that the hurricane is a kind of bad boy. She says that "Floyd's / cussing up a storm"—as though the storm itself, with its powerful, destructive wind comes from the Floyd's rough, tough personality, his cussing.

These moments of personification are important to the poem. They allow the speaker to think of Floyd, with its violence and energy, as a man. In so doing, they allow her to reminisce on her past crushes—the storm brings with it "a host / of daydreams." These past crushes were on "worthless" teenage boys with all the passion and swagger of a hurricane. But, like a hurricane, those boys were hollow at their centers: their love might be as powerful as a storm, but it's ultimately empty and unsatisfying. Personifying the storm allows the speaker to reflect on the seductive appeal of such love—and it also moves her toward an appreciation for the much richer, if less dramatic, relationship she enjoys with her husband.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 13-14:** "Today a hurricane is nudging up the coast, / Oddly male: Big Bad Floyd"
- **Lines 20-21:** "Floyd's / Cussing up a storm"

ASYNDETON

The speaker of "Cozy Apologia" employs asyndeton throughout the poem. The device plays different roles at different points. For example, in lines 18-20, asyndeton helps convey the breathless passion of teenage love:

> ...Marcel, Percy, Dewey;
> Were thin as licorice and as chewy,
> Sweet with a dark and hollow center.

Here, the lack of a connecting word like "and" or "but" between lines 19 and 20 makes it feel like the speaker is rushing, excited by the prospect of these "worthless boys / whose only talent was to kiss you senseless." At the same time, however, the use of asyndeton in line 18—the speaker simply lists the boys' names with nothing to connect them—suggests that the boys are interchangeable: empty personalities with no depth or importance in themselves.

The speaker uses asyndeton again at the start of the next stanza in lines 21-23:

> You're bunkered in your
> Aerie, I'm perched in mine
> (Twin desks, computers, hardwood floors):

Here, the speaker seems to be rushing, breathless once again—but not from passion. Instead, asyndeton here conveys the hectic bustle of modern life, with all its demands and technologies. Coming just after lines 18-20, with their passion and excitement, the banality of these lines is all the more pressing, even oppressive. The reader feels let down by this return to reality. But, the speaker will soon argue, the pleasures of reality are more satisfying than anything on offer in romantic fantasy. Asyndeton thus plays different roles in "Cozy Apologia"—sometimes emphasizing the power and passion of the speaker's romantic fantasies, sometimes the banality and bustle of the modern world.

Where Asyndeton appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "This lamp, the wind-still rain, the glossy blue"
- **Line 10:** "One eye smiling, the other firm upon the enemy."
- **Lines 18-20:** "Marcel, Percy, Dewey; / Were thin as licorice and as chewy, / Sweet with a dark and hollow center. "
- **Lines 21-23:** "You're bunkered in your / Aerie, I'm perched in mine / (Twin desks, computers, hardwood floors):"
- **Lines 26-27:** "Who's satisfied simply with what's good for us, / When has the ordinary ever been news?"

CLICHÉ

In lines 4-10, the speaker purposefully employs cliché to describe the love that she feels—or wants to feel. In the first 3 lines of the poem, the speaker talks about how—no matter what she's thinking about—her thoughts always return to her husband. Then, in lines 4-10, she describes how she imagines her husband. She does so in terms drawn from the pages of cheap romance novels. He is a "hero" wearing "chain mail" and riding a "dappled mare"; he is gentle toward the speaker, "smiling" at her, but fierce and brave in battle, with one eye "firm upon the enemy." In other words, he's a knight in shining armor and she's a damsel in distress. The speaker's fantasy is clichéd. And so her is her language: she adopts the kind of language one would expect in a romance novel, with "dappled" horses, "glinting" armor, and "silver stirrups."

These clichés feel out-of-touch with the poem's setting—America in the late 1990s, with its "compact disks / And faxes." There weren't any knights in shining armor in the 1990s. Further, the sense that these lines are a little bit archaic, a bit out-of-touch, is reinforced by the poem's use of rhyming couplets and (intermittently) iambic pentameter. That turns some of these lines into heroic couplets—a dignified but dated poetic form. The speaker uses cliché to and the poem's somewhat archaic form to give the reader a strong sense that the speaker's fantasies are in conflict with the reality in which she lives.

Where Cliché appears in the poem:

- **Lines 4-10:** "I could choose any hero, any cause or age / And, sure as shooting arrows to the heart, / Astride a dappled mare, legs braced as far apart / As standing in silver stirrups will allow— / There you'll be, with furrowed brow / And chain mail glinting, to set me free: / One eye smiling, the other firm upon the enemy."

APOSTROPHE

In most printings, "Cozy Apologia" opens with a dedication: the poem is "for Fred," Rita Dove's husband. The speaker of the poem uses apostrophe, addressing Fred directly throughout the poem, calling him simply "you." She talks to him as though he's sitting right beside her, even though he's off in another room, sitting in his office, while the speaker sits in hers: "You're bunkered in your / Aerie, I'm perched in mine..."

The speaker's use of apostrophe helps clarify what's at stake in the poem. The speaker isn't meditating on love, romance, and passion in the abstract. Instead, she's wrestling with the problems and satisfactions of her current relationship.

Indeed, the poem's first and last line both contain instances of apostrophe:

> I could pick anything and think of you— (1)

I fill this stolen time with you. (30).

Apostrophe brackets the poem, introducing its themes, bringing its major conflicts to a close. As the poem starts and ends, the speaker is thinking about Fred, her husband—even though she indulges in fantasies about past crushes in its middle sections. The poem's use of apostrophe thus underlines the speaker's fundamental concerns, the questions that run through the poem and its consideration of her relationship with Fred.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "I could pick anything and think of you"
- **Line 8:** "There you'll be"
- **Lines 21-22:** "You're bunkered in your / Aerie,"
- **Line 30:** "I fill this stolen time with you"

VOCABULARY

Wind-Still (Line 2) - Quiet, relaxing. The rain is falling silently; the wind isn't blowing.

Glossy (Line 2) - Shiny, slick, describing the ink as it comes out of a pen.

Matte (Line 3) - Dull, dry, describing ink after it has dried.

Astride (Line 6) - Sitting upon. The speaker imagines her lover riding the horse.

Dappled (Line 6) - Many-colored. The horse has spots.

Post-postmodern (Line 11) - The modern world, the contemporary moment. A reference to the idea that the present is a "post-modern" moment. As described by theorists like Frederic Jameson and Jean Baudrillard, post-modernism is a complex phenomenon, encompassing developments in politics, economics, art, architecture, film, even reality itself. Most broadly, post-modernism involves irony and detachment—an obsession with surfaces and appearances rather than the depths of things. Calling the present "post-postmodern," the speaker implies that the present has become even more "postmodern" than post-modernism itself.

Big Bad Floyd (Line 14) - Hurricane Floyd, an enormous, devastating hurricane that struck the Bahamas and the East Coast of the United States in 1999.

Sissy (Line 18) - Girly, not traditionally masculine. A derogatory term.

Cussing (Line 21) - Cursing.

Bunkered (Line 21) - Hunkered down, inside a protected placed.

Aerie (Line 22) - A bird's nest. The word usually describes eagles' nests, built high up on cliffs.

Divine (Line 24) - Heavenly, overpowering.

Melancholy (Line 29) - Sadness, depression.

Blues (Line 29) - Sadness or depression. The blues is a traditional form of African American popular music. It is known for its mournful tone. Its lyrics often deal with sadness and despair.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Cozy Apologia" is a 30-line poem, divided into three 10 line stanzas. The poem doesn't have a regular rhyme scheme or meter—though it often flirts with both. For example, the first stanza and most of the second are written in rhyming couplets—which makes them almost heroic couplets, a prestigious form centuries before the poem was written but very out of fashion for the time when the poem was written, which makes them well suited to the romantic fantasies in which the speaker indulges. After line 14, however, the poem's rhymes become complicated and irregular. Although it's primarily written in free verse, the poem thus sometimes feels like a formal poem, with meter and rhyme—only to fall into disorder.

The poem's form thus echoes the tension with which the speaker wrestles. Just as the speaker struggles with the discrepancy between romantic fantasy and the mundane reality of an actual modern relationship, so too the poem moves between order and disorder, control and freedom, old-fashioned ways of writing poetry and "post-postmodern" poetic flexibility. The sections of the poem written in rhyme often feel like expressions of the speaker's romantic fantasies, while the rhymeless sections usually feel much more down-to-earth, dealing with everyday life in the modern world.

METER

"Cozy Apologia" is mostly written in free verse, which means it doesn't have a set or stable meter. However, the poem often flirts with meter—and many of its lines are in iambic pentameter. Iambic pentameter follows a duh DUH rhythm of unstressed and stressed syllables, with five feet per line. For example, the first line of the poem has this meter:

I could | pick an- | ything | and think | of you—

Particularly in its final three feet, the line settles into a strong iambic rhythm. (The first two feet are a bit more rhythmically ambiguous—though they could be scanned in several ways, they are probably trochees).

Because the poem starts with this mostly iambic meter, it sets

up the reader's expectations. The reader expects a metrical poem, a poem that maintains a steady rhythm throughout. That expectation makes the poem's descent into free verse feel disruptive, even disappointing. For instance, while line 21 is written, more or less, in iambic pentameter, line 22 is just six syllables long:

> Aerie, I'm perched in mine

It feels like the speaker has come up short, disappointed, frustrated with the reality of her life after contemplating the seductive power of "Big Bad Floyd." The shifts in the poem's rhythms and meter—from iambic pentameter into free verse—thus echo and reinforce the speaker's broader struggles between romantic fantasy and the mundane reality of an ordinary relationship. While iambic pentameter calls the speaker back to archaic poetic practices and romantic fantasies, the free verse remains rooted in the present—which seems, at least on its surface, bland by comparison.

RHYME SCHEME

For its first fifteen or so lines, "Cozy Apologia" is written in rhyming couplets. Its rhyme scheme is *AABBCC*... etc. Because many of these lines are written in iambic pentameter, lines 1-14 are often heroic couplets—or almost heroic couplets. Heroic couplets have a distinguished history—the form used by poets like Alexander Pope and Phillis Wheatley to discuss subjects of the highest philosophical and political importance. But, by the time Rita Dove wrote the poem, such heroic couplets were out of fashion—and had been for a long, long time. A modern poem written in heroic couplets thus feels a bit archaic, a bit old-fashioned. There's a tension, in these early lines, between the poem's outdated form and its setting in the "post-postmodern" present—a tension one hears in rhymes like "compact disks" and "take-no-risks" in lines 11 and 12. It feels faintly silly to hear something like a "compact disk" get this highly refined poetic treatment.

However, the poem's rhymes suit the speaker's mood, her frustration with the mundane circumstances of the modern world. The speaker wants to indulge in romantic fantasy. In doing so, she retreats to out-of-date clichés drawn from the pages of cheesy romance novels. For example, in lines 8-10, she compares her lover to a knight in shining armor:

> There you'll be, with furrowed brow
> And chain mail glinting, to set me free:
> One eye smiling, the other firm upon the enemy.

The fantasy is out of keeping with the poem's modern setting—just as its rhymes are also out of fashion in modern poetry. The rhymes thus reinforce and underline the speaker's desire to escape the present, to retreat into fantasy.

However, as the poem proceeds, the speaker rejects these fantasies as hollow, empty. Instead, she focuses on the deeper, richer, pleasures of a real relationship. As she does so, the rhymes shift. Sometimes, the poem rhymes *ABAB*—as in lines 21-24 and lines 27-30; sometimes it doesn't rhyme at all, as in lines 26-27; elsewhere it slips back into rhyming couplets in lines 18-19. These shifting, unpredictable rhymes suggest that the speaker has given up on the romantic fantasies of the first half of the poem, and is instead diving into the complicated, but ultimately more rewarding pleasures of real life.

SPEAKER

"Cozy Apologia" is an autobiographical poem. In most printings, it is dedicated to "Fred," Rita Dove's husband. Although the poem never explicitly says so, most readers assume that the speaker is Dove herself—and that she is explicitly addressing her husband, thinking through the pleasures and problems of their relationship.

The speaker finds their love deeply satisfying—so much so that she's a little embarrassed. After all, as she asks in line 27, "When has the ordinary ever been news?" In other words, there's nothing particularly exceptional about their marriage. It doesn't have the grandiose passion of a teenage crush or a romance novel. But, the speaker eventually comes to see such fantasies as having a "hollow center"—they are empty at their cores. By contrast, she strongly defends the pleasures and rewards of her marriage to "Fred," arguing that it is deep and sustaining, even if it lacks the flash that might set a teenager's heart a-flutter.

SETTING

"Cozy Apologia" is set in the United States in 1999. The poem references a major hurricane from the fall of 1999, Hurricane Floyd—which the speaker calls "Big Bad Floyd." Hurricane Floyd did significant damage to the Bahamas and the Eastern seaboard of the United States. The poem also references some of the office technologies that were in wide use during the period—"compact disks / And faxes."

These references to historically specific storms and technologies serves a broader purpose for the poem. It helps the speaker situate the poem firmly in the present—a mundane and unsexy moment in human history. In other words, there's a tension between the poem's work-a-day world and the grand romantic fantasies the speaker indulges in. There are no knights in shining armor in America in the 1990s. Indeed, the speaker's romance takes place in unremarkable domestic settings—for instance, the speaker spends some time describing the home offices she and her lover share, with "twin desks, computers, hardwood floors." But, after some reflection,

the speaker realizes that such fantasies are "hollow." Though it's part of a mundane, bland world, the speaker's love is much richer and more satisfying.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Rita Dove wrote "Cozy Apologia" in the late 1990s, at a time when she was already a major figure in American poetry. She won the Pulitzer Prize in 1987 and served as the Poet Laureate of the United States from 1993-1995. Dove's poetry certainly reflects some of the key poetic trends of the 1990s. At the time, many poets were writing autobiographical poems: poems that reflected on key moments in their personal experience. They used loose free verse to do so. In other words, this group of poets—sometimes called "lyric narrative" poets—had left behind the wild experiments of the early part of the twentieth century. While their poems rarely follow strict forms such as sonnets, the poems also aren't radically experimental. The easy-going tone and autobiographical musings of "Cozy Apologia" fit nicely in these poetic trends.

However, Rita Dove is also a virtuosic user of poetic forms, a poet with a hunger to experiment and play with many different kinds of poetic techniques. And, with its frequent iambic pentameter lines and its rhyming couplets (approximating heroic couplets), "Cozy Apologia" revives out-of-date and out-of-style poetic modes. The poem thus feels strangely archaic at points, out of keeping with its setting in the 1990s—and with the poetic styles of the period. Dove carefully manipulates the poem, introducing these formal elements in the first half of the poem where her speaker is indulging in romantic fantasies drawn from the pages of romance novels—fantasies about knights in shining armor, heroic lovers. The poem thus uses these archaic formal elements to suggest that these fantasies are disconnected from the circumstances of her real life. Elsewhere in the poem, she uses more complicated and less stable rhymes; her poem drops out of meter into free verse. These parts of the poem reflect the complicated and unsexy reality of life in the 1990s.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"Cozy Apologia" was written in the late 1990s. This was a time of peace and relative prosperity in the United States. Many of the major conflicts of the twentieth century—for instance, the Cold War—had wrapped up in America's favor. The politics of the period were less focused on grand battles with communism and more on mundane domestic business: taxes, welfare reform, dotcom stocks.

For the speaker, this mundane world feels profoundly unsexy: it takes no grand risks and it has no grand passions. As a result, there's a strong disconnect between the world as it actually is, with its "compact disks / And faxes" and the romantic fantasies she cherishes—fantasies derived from romance novels and teenage crushes. At the heart of the poem, then, there's a tension between the world in which the speaker actually lives—pleasant, but mundane—and the world of her fantasies, with their sweeping, overwhelming loves and desires. The speaker's marriage belongs solidly to the real world. And so, the speaker has to decide what matters more: a satisfying, if ordinary, everyday life or the world of fantasy.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "Cozy Apologia" Read Aloud — Theo O'Shaughnessy recites "Cozy Apologia." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhVOJrNPH48)
- Rita Dove — A detailed biography of Rita Dove from the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/rita-dove)
- An Interview with Rita Dove — Rita Dove discusses her work on PBS. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3B1A8L-5ws)
- Rita Dove at the White House — Rita Dove reads two poems and is introduced by former US President Barack Obama at the White House. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIT82Oy9U1Y)
- An Interview with Rita Dove — An in-depth interview with Rita Dove at the Virginia Quarterly Review. (https://www.vqronline.org/interviews-articles/2016/01/interview-rita-dove)

HOW TO CITE

MLA

Altman, Toby. "*Cozy Apologia.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 28 Oct 2019. Web. 22 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Altman, Toby. "*Cozy Apologia.*" LitCharts LLC, October 28, 2019. Retrieved April 22, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/rita-dove/cozy-apologia.